NEWS Florida Fossil Hunters

Florida Prehistorical Museum, Inc.
dba/ Florida Fossil Hunters
Volume 36, Number 4

JUL/AUG 2026

From Ye Olde President…..

It's July and the heat is on – hot weather and lots of hot fossil hunting stories to share. Remember heat stroke is a real threat so know your limits and drink plenty of fluids when you are outside. FFH will have an all meeting "fossil swap" to encourage more interactions among the members. Every member brings in fossils to talk about and swap with other members.

FFH Junes Fossil Cash Auction & Club Barbecue was a great success. We had 22 members attend and raised $600. We had lots of fun with good company. I also want to say thank you to all the club members for supporting their club.

There will be **NO MEETING in July** at the Orlando Science Center.

We will be having a **field trip on Saturday July 25th** at the Peace River. We are meeting at the Wauchula Riverside Park at 9 am. Riverside park address is 130 Park Drive/1322 E Main St. Wauchula, FL. ***See page 2 for more info***

August meeting, our guest speaker will be Jim Zacharias Senior Curator of history of MOSA Museum in Daytona. See page 2 for more info.

Thank you
Salvatore Sansone,
FFH President

FOSSIL SWAP
at each Meeting!

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

SUPPORT YOUR CLUB

Buy fossil t-shirts. Different shirts are available for adults and kids at each meeting. Cost of shirts for kids are $20 and adults are $25.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Saturday, July 25th
Field Trip - *details on page 2.*

Saturday, August 15th
2pm Paleontology for Kids
3pm Meeting
FFH meeting at OSC

2026 Calendar of Events
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FOSSIL FAIR
October 3-4, 2026

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www.floridafossilhunters.com

MEETINGS & MORE

August 15th Meeting

August meeting, our guest speaker will be Jim Zacharias Senior Curator of history of MOSA Museum in Daytona.

Join Senior Curator Zach Zacharias and learn about the new Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art, Science and History formerly the MOAS in Daytona Beach. See the designs of this new 150-million-dollar museum and the new installation of its famous giant ground sloth. Behind every fossil discovery is a human story, learn about the history of the discovery of this world class specimen and its morphology.

Regular Meetings are held at the Orlando Science Center. *Unless otherwise noted.* Admission and parking is FREE to members. At the garage & ticket counter inform them you are there for the meeting.

At EVERY meeting!

- Support your club with the purchase of vintage fossil fair t-shirts! Variety of sizes available at meetings while they last. $25/Adults and Kids/$20.
- "Fossil swap": every member brings in fossils to talk about and swap.
- Paleontology for Kids has been a success and will be held before the general meetings at 2:00pm.

REAL or AI Halluncinated Fossil Articles: Check Sources

Looking for articles, I ran across an article that appeared to be interesting. Digging deeper, I could not find any sources. Asking AI about the article, the response verified that facts were not verifiable through additional sources and some information were likely AI hallucinations. A reminder that false or inaccurate AI stories impact all areas of interest.

MEMBER REGISTRATION

https://floridafossilhunters.com/membership, mail in the form on pg 7 or renew at the meeting.
MUST BE REGISTERED FOR FIELD TRIPS

PALEONTOLOGY FOR KIDS

Every OSC Meeting; 2:00-3:00pm

Kids' Fossil Blast is an informal, hands-on experience aimed at kids ages 5 to 14.

Thank you Laura and Francesca for your hard work and dedication to making Paleontology for Kids a success.

Peace River Field Trip

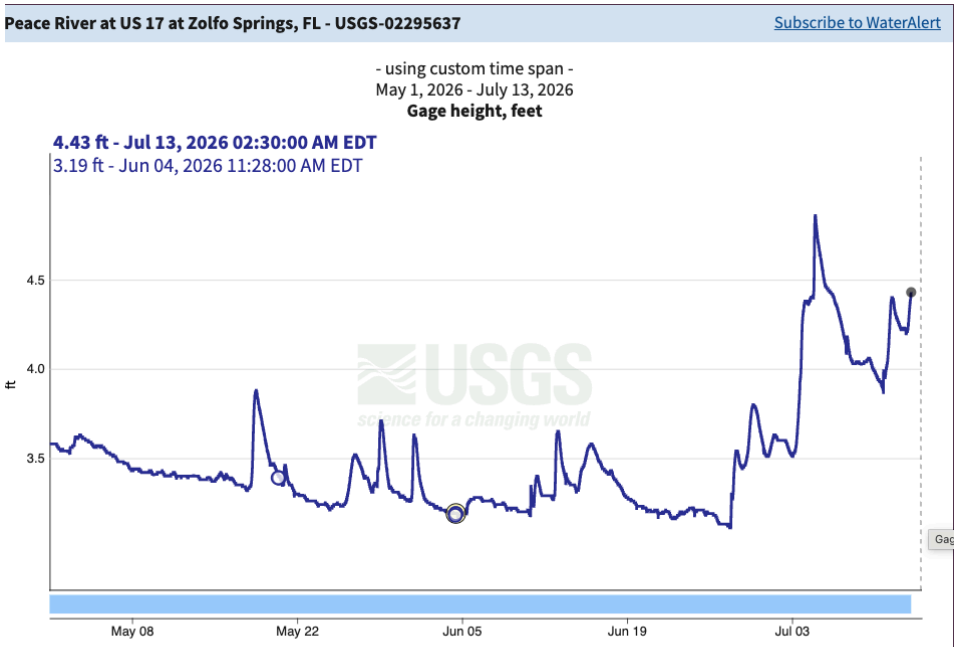
We will be having a **field trip on Saturday July 25th** at the Peace River. We are meeting at the Wauchula Riverside Park at 9 am. Riverside park address is 130 Park Drive/1322 E Main St. Wauchula, FL.

Please bring your own canoe or Kayak. We have 5 canoes available for rent through Mark Voke. You can reserve your canoe by contacting Mark at Mark@autopro4u.com. It will be first come, first serve! Families- The rule for a canoe is two adults and one child in each canoe. Life Jackets are highly recommended for children in the canoe.

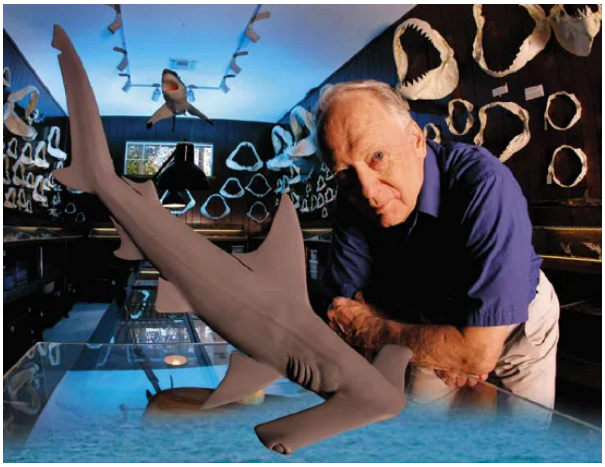
In order to participate in the fieldtrip, All members of the party must be up to date of the membership dues paid in full due to insurance coverage. Bring your own lunch. The restrooms at the park are open! This field trip is subject to change due to weather or high water level of the river! If you are planning to join us, please contact Mark Voke at: mark@autopro4u.com or Steve Sharpe at 352-552-2296.

PIECE ON THE PEACE

Want the most current height? Visit floridafossilhunters.com and click on the easy Peace River Gauge button in the sidebar or under the Resources tab for the latest water level data or visit the USGS website directly.
PEACE RIVER AT US 17 AT ZOLFO SPRINGS, FL



In Memoriam: Dr. Gordon Hubbell, A Giant in Shark Paleontology



Dr. Gordon Hubbell, a Gainesville, Florida resident and towering figure in shark paleontology, has passed away, leaving behind a legacy as remarkable as the collection he spent a lifetime building.

Trained as a veterinarian at Ohio State University, Dr. Hubbell was, by technical definition, an amateur paleontologist — yet few professionals in the world could match his expertise. He was considered by many to be one of the foremost experts in shark paleontology, boasting perhaps the largest collections of rare shark jaws and fossil shark teeth.

His passion was ignited right here in Florida. After a friend suggested he visit the phosphate mines of central Florida to collect fossil shark teeth, he was immediately hooked. What began as a hobby grew into a world-class scientific resource, with 51 sets of teeth.

His most celebrated discovery came from the Peruvian desert, where he recovered the only complete fossilized skull of a great white shark. He later donated this extraordinary specimen to the Florida Museum of Natural History, and in 2012, scientists formally honored him by naming an entirely new species after him: Carcharodon hubbelli — Hubbell's white shark, a transitional form bridging ancient mako sharks and the modern great white.

What stood out to everyone who visited his collection was that Gordon wanted visitors to learn and be excited about sharks. Dr. Hubbell’s commitment proved what fossil hunters everywhere know: passion, curiosity, and dedication can change science. He will be deeply missed.

Scientists finally solved the mystery of Earth's greatest mass extinction

Stanford University | July 12, 2026

Why Some Ocean Animals Survived Earth's Greatest Mass Extinction — And What It Means for Today

A new Stanford-led study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences offers the strongest explanation yet for why certain marine species survived the Permian-Triassic extinction — the most catastrophic die-off in Earth's history — while the vast majority did not.

The Great Dying

Roughly 252 million years ago, massive volcanic eruptions flooded the atmosphere with carbon dioxide and methane, warming the planet and stripping oxygen from the oceans. The result wiped out 96% of marine species and 70% of land animals. For 280 million years prior, ancient seafloors had been dominated by brachiopods, sea lilies, and slow-moving filter feeders. After the catastrophe, those groups were nearly eliminated, while mollusks, fish, and echinoderms like starfish and sea urchins survived in far greater numbers — a pattern that defines our oceans today.

Metabolism Was the Deciding Factor

The study is the first to combine physiological data from both the groups that perished and those that survived. The answer came down to metabolism. Slow-moving ancient species thrived in cool, oxygen-rich water but couldn't adapt when temperatures rose and oxygen dropped — their oxygen demands spiked faster than they could manage. More active species like clams and fish, already equipped with the muscles and gill capacity to handle higher energy demands, were far better positioned to endure the shift.

The numbers tell the story: before the extinction, brachiopods vastly outnumbered bivalves. Today only about 400 brachiopod species remain compared to an estimated 10,000–15,000 bivalve species.

Representative samples of the modern fauna (left three samples) and the Paleozoic fauna (right four samples). Credit: Sarah Leibovitz

A Warning for Modern Oceans

Senior author Erik Sperling called the findings "the final nail in the coffin" for understanding the Great Dying — and draws a direct line to today. Ocean conditions before the extinction closely resembled our own relatively cool, well-oxygenated seas before human-driven climate change began altering them.

The Great Dying unfolded over thousands of years with temperature increases of 8–12°C. Today's worst-case projections suggest oceans could warm 1.5–4°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100 — in just 100–200 years.

"The bad news is we are on track for Permian-Triassic levels of warming in worst-case scenario projections," said Sperling. "But the good news is, we're still at the point where we can change things."

Full article and see more pictures:
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/07/260711010122.htm

Divers discover 500,000-year-old treasure trove of fossils in Florida sinkhole

By Tom Howarth, February 18, 2025

Divers in Florida's Steinhatchee River stumbled upon hundreds of pristine fossils from an obscure Ice Age period, including giant armadillos, ancient horses and possibly a new species of tapir.

Fossil collectors have discovered a prehistoric graveyard buried in Florida's Steinhatchee River. The site has yielded a remarkable collection of more than 500 fossils dating back roughly half a million years. It was full of exceptionally well-preserved bones from ancient mammals, including horses, giant armadillos, sloths and possibly a new species of tapir.

Around 500,000 years ago, before the river flowed over the site, a sinkhole opened up in Florida's Big Bend region and became a death trap for hundreds of animals. Sediment filled the sinkhole over time, entombing their remains in near-pristine condition.

These fossils remained hidden until 2022, when fossil collectors Robert Sinibaldi and Joseph Branin stumbled upon them during a routine diving expedition in the river's murky waters. After Branin spotted horse teeth sticking out of the sediment, the pair uncovered a hoof core and a tapir skull, signaling a potential major discovery.

"It wasn't just quantity, it was quality," Sinibaldi said in a statement released on Feb. 12 by the Florida Museum of Natural History. "We knew we had an important site, but we didn't know how important."

The Florida Museum recognized the significance of the find and dated it to the middle of the Irvingtonian North American Land Mammal Age (1.6 million–250,000 years ago)—an evolutionary transition period with a sparse fossil record.

Snapshots of evolutionary transitions

One of the key discoveries are fossils from an extinct giant armadillo-like creature called Holmesina. Within this genus, scientists knew that

(Image credit: Florida Museum/Kristen Grace)

there was a transition from a species that lived two million years ago, the 150-pound H floridanus, to H. septentrionalis, which reached a whopping 475 pounds — but there was little evidence of how the change in size occurred.

Views of an ancient landscape

Among the 552 fossils recovered, about 75 percent belong to an early species of caballine horses — the subgroup that includes modern domestic horses.

Horses tend to dwell on large expanses of grassland rather than dense forests such as those that occupy the Big Bend region today. Since horses make up such a large chunk of the fossils discovered at Steinhatchee River, the researchers concluded that the site area may have once been more open and grassy.

Horse teeth were some of the best preserved fossils in the sinkhole. "For the first time, we had individuals that were complete enough to show us upper teeth, lower teeth and the front incisors of the same individual," Richard Hulbert.

Full article and see more pictures:
https://www.livescience.com/animals/extinct-species/divers-discover-500-000-year-old-treasure-trove-of-fossils-in-florida-sinkhole

Ancient altercations between musk turtles and alligator gar recorded in Florida’s fossil record

Date: by Jerald Pinson • May 27, 2026

A newly described extinct musk turtle species is shedding light on the prehistoric battles that played out in Florida's ancient waterways roughly 5.5 million years ago — and the fossils tell a surprisingly scrappy story.

Florida Museum of Natural History paleontologist Jason Bourque spent a decade studying hundreds of turtle fossils unearthed at the Montbrook fossil site in North Florida. Among them were the remains of a previously unknown musk turtle species, now named Sternotherus pugnatus — a nod to its pugnacious nature, evidenced by healed bite marks, scratches, and broken bones preserved in the shells.

The culprit behind the damage? Most likely an alligator gar. Tiny tooth fragments — smaller than a grain of rice — were found embedded in the turtle shells. After comparing them against multiple species that inhabited the region at the time, Bourque identified them as consistent with alligator gar, one of North America's largest freshwater fish, capable of growing ten feet long and weighing up to 370 pounds.

The fossils came primarily from what excavators call the "turtle death layer" — a dense concentration of hundreds of shells with a curious mystery attached: no skulls or limbs were found alongside them. Bourque initially suspected the turtles had congregated in a drought-shrunken pool, but a newer theory suggests carnivorous birds may have carried the turtles to a favored feeding tree, consuming the exposed extremities and leaving only the shells behind.

As for the ancient standoff with the gar — the turtle likely survived, possibly deploying its notorious chemical defense: a volatile acid that has been compared to burning tires and cheesy garbage.

Bourque published the new species description in the journal Historical Biology.

This is a summary, read the full article and see all of the pictures: *https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/science/ancient-altercations-between-musk-turtles-and-alligator-gars-recorded-in-floridas-fossil-record/*

Florida Fossil Hunters

is a fun and educational group whose goal is to further our understanding of the prehistory of Florida. We encourage family participation and welcome explorers of all ages.

Membership options are listed to the right.

Meetings are usually held on the third Saturday of the month but may vary with club activities. Check the website for the date and location of the next meeting or call one of the officers.

Officers:

President	Salvatore Sansone	(321) 278-9294
Vice President	Steve Sharpe	(352) 552-2296
Secretary	Melissa Dunaway	(407) 461-8507
Treasurer	David Dunaway	(407) 786-8844

Chairs:

Field Trips	**OPEN**	
Fossil Fair	Valerie First	(407) 699-9274
Fossil Auctions	Dave Dunaway	(407) 786-8844
Fossil Bucks	Dave Dunaway	(407) 786-8844
Fossil Lotto	Ed Metrin	(407) 321-7462
Membership	Ken Sellers	
Newsletter	Elise Cronin-Hurley, info@elisech.com	
Photography	John Heinsen	(407) 291-7672
Facebook	Salvatore Sansone	
	Ken Sellers	
Webmaster	Elise Cronin-Hurley, info@elisech.com	

Board of Directors:

Joyce Bittle	(407) 341-6366
Melissa Dunaway	(407) 461-8507
Marge Fantozi	(407) 256-5566
Valerie First	(407) 699-9274
Ed Metrin	(407) 321-7462
Ken Sellers	(407) 457-4117

Florida Prehistorical Museum, Inc.
dba/ Florida Fossil Hunters

Membership Application

MAIL in this form or Register ONLINE at
www.floridafossilhunters.com/membership

Name:			
Associate Members			
Address:			
Phone:			
Email:			
☐	New	☐	Renewal
Please list any interests, experience, talents or just plain enthusiasm, which you would like to offer to the club:			

Family membership: $25
Individual membership: $20

Please make your checks payable to:

Florida Fossil Hunters
Post Office Box 540404
Orlando, Florida 32854-0404

Associate members are people in the same household, included at no extra charge, 2 adult votes per household with Family Membership. Per our insurance policy, family membership covers married couples and children. All other individuals must have separate individual membership to be covered by our club insurance.

Membership year runs from January to December.

Newsletter Policy

Articles must be submitted two weeks before publication date. to be considered for an issue. Emailed to: info@floridafossilhunters.com. Articles can be sent either as text in the email, in a google doc, or in Microsoft Word files (.docx). Please note in subject of email 'FFH News: [article or info]

Florida Fossil Hunters Meetings & Events

MARK YOUR 2026 CALENDAR

Meetings 3pm at OSC | Paleontology for Kids at 2pm and alternative time and location noted when applicable.

MORE INFO PG 2

July 25, 2026,
Peace River Field Trip

August 15, 2026,
Meeting with guest speaker will be Jim Zacharias Senior

September 26, 2026, Meeting

2026 Fossil Fair
October 3-4th

No October Meeting

November 21, 2026, Meeting

December date tba,
FFH Annual Christmas Party and Fossil Bucks Auction

SEE INSIDE
for more information on events

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Email info@floridafossilhunters.com to share articles, questions, & comments

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